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ABSTRACT

This report demonstrates that alternative assessments, nonstandardized ways of assessment, are more comprehensive ways of exhibiting student achievement. Alternative assessment includes such things as portfolios, checklists, rubrics. surveys, student-involved assignments, and reflections. The population for this study consisted of fifth, seventh, and eighth grade classes at three different schools. One class was a special education class of only five students; the others were classes of approximately 21 students. Alternative assessment skills were assessed and documented to determine an increase in student involvement and enthusiasm. While standardized tests have generally focused on the final answer, alternative assessments emphasize the learning process. The solution strategies suggested by this study include the use of portfolios, questionnaires, rubrics, student self-assessments, and student and teacher reflections on the learning experience. These assessment skills were taught in the classes and reinforced throughout the intervention process. Postintervention data indicate that using these various types of assessment is a more complete, and more importantly, more authentic assessment of student achievement. (Contains 8 figures and 18 references.) (SLD)

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BUILDING QUALITY ASSESSMENT

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight

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ABSTRACT

This report demonstrates that alternative assessments are a more comprehensive way of exhibiting student achievement. Alternative Assessment is a non-standardized method of assessment. Among other types of evaluations, this definition includes such things as portfolios, checklists, rubrics, surveys, student involved assessments, as well as reflections. The selected student population consisted of fifth, seventh and eighth grade classes. Alternative Assessment skills were assessed and documented to determine an increase in student involvement and enthusiasm toward work.

Analysis of standardized testing shows a limited profile of actual student achievement. More importantly, they fell short in measuring student ability in active skills such as writing, speaking, acting, drawing, constructing, repairing, and other skills that are required of students over the course of their schooling. Standardized tests generally focused on the final answer instead of the learning processes involved in getting to that final answer.

A review of solution strategies suggested by our research, included the use of portfolios, questionnaires, rubrics, various student self assessments, as well as student and teacher reflections. These assessment skills were taught at the beginning and reinforced throughout the intervention process.

Post intervention data indicated using various types of evaluation is a complete and, more importantly, authentic assessment of student achievement.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

In a time when standardized testing was the prevalent and popular measure of student success or failure in school, we discovered that standardized testing did not measure many skills that students were required to learn. A major problem with standardized tests was that they were usually culturally biased. More importantly, they fell short in measuring student ability in active skills such as writing, speaking, acting, drawing, constructing, repairing, and other skills that were required of students over the course of their schooling. As educators, we knew that there were many different types of learning and, consequently, many different ways to assess students. This research project asked the students to become more involved in the assessment process. It indicated that using many different types of assessments, rather than strictly paper/pencil or standardized tests, was a more authentic and meaningful method of assessment. Each assessment was tailored to the local site and population being evaluated. The local sites were comprised of fifth, seventh, and eighth grade classes.

Immediate Problem Context

The research environment consisted of three different schools, Site H, Site M, and Site C. All three sites were considered middle income schools in their respective communities.

Site H had a student population comprised of approximately 1,740 students located on two campuses. The student population was divided into four different groups. These groups

included an academic academy, a fine arts academy, a technology program, and the general student population. Site H had about 100 teachers with an average of 16.8 years of experience. Of these teachers, 58.9% had a Master's degree or above, and 99.4% of the teachers were of Caucasian descent. There were eight, forty-minute periods per day, and the average class size was 18.5. The student population of Site H had a racial make-up of 91% Caucasian and 9% minority with 16.5% of all families being low income. Approximately 0.6% of the students spoke English as a second language. There were 11 chronic truants who contributed to a truancy rate of 0.6%. Overall, 92.2% of all students attended school every day.

Site M had a student population comprised of approximately 310 students. Site M provided many special services for its students including special education, life skills programs, English as a second language, accelerated math, accelerated science, accelerated language arts, counseling, drug awareness education, and conflict resolution. Site M had about 20 teachers with an average of 16.8 years of experience. At Site M, 51.9% of the teachers had a Master's degree or above. Of these teachers, 99.1% were of Caucasian descent. The average class size of Site M was 23 students. The student population of Site M had a racial make-up of 82% Caucasian, and 18% minority, with 17.7% of the minority descending from Hispanic cultures. Less than one quarter of all students at Site M received free or reduced lunch. Seven percent of the students spoke English as a second language, and 30 students received special education services. There were no chronic truants at Site M, and 96.1% of all students attended school every day.

Site C had a student population comprised of approximately 450 students. Site C provided many of the same services for its students as Site M including special education, English as a second language, accelerated math, accelerated science, accelerated language arts,

counseling, drug awareness education, and conflict resolution. Site C had 32 teachers with an average of 16.8 years of experience. Of those teachers, 52% had a Master's degree or above and 99.1% of the teachers were of Caucasian descent. The average class size of Site C was 21 students. The student population of Site C had a racial make-up of 75% Caucasian, and 25% minority, with 22% of all families being low income. Approximately 4% of the students spoke English as a second language. There were no chronic truants at Site C, and 95.6% of all students attended school every day.

The Surrounding Community

Sites C and M were in a community made up of about 8,700 people, with approximately 4,400 households. There was a slightly higher female population as compared to the male population. The community was 81% Caucasian and 14% Hispanic. Other nationalities made up the remaining 5% of the total population. Site H was a community of about 35,000 people, with an average age of 32.2. The community had a 97.5% Caucasian population, with 2.5% of the population minority. Sites C and M had 7.6 times as many minorities as Site H.

Site H had 26.2% of its population under eighteen years of age, while Sites C and M had a slightly higher population under eighteen at 27.8%. The average household income for Site H was approximately $44,400 while Sites C and M had an average household income of only $29,200. There were 23 churches where Sites C and M were located. The largest employer of Sites C and M was a food packaging industry which employed about 1,100 people, while the largest employer of Site H was the local school district employing about 800 people.

National Context of the Problem

An American educator who was examining the British educational system once asked a headmaster why so little standardized testing took place in British schools. "My dear fellow,"

came the reply, "in Britain we are of the belief that when a child is hungry, he should be fed, not weighed" (Bowers 1989). We can ask, in turn, why do we do so much standardized testing in the United States?

Standardized tests were an inexpensive and adequate way to measure student comprehension, and compare students nationwide. These tests were also used to assess the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and even entire districts (Robinson and Craver 1989). The major problem with standardized testing was that it fell short in measuring student ability in active skills such as writing, speaking, acting, drawing, constructing, repairing, and other skills that were required of students over the course of their schooling. More and more, educators were turning to various alternative assessments at the local, state, and national levels.

The newer definition of learning, which was based on cognitive, philosophical, and multicultural perspectives, suggests that meaningful learning occurred when a learner had a knowledge base that could be used to make sense of the world, solve problems, and make decisions (M. Kulicke, J. Bakker, et al 1990). Standards indicate that we must make sure to align both our curriculum and classroom environment. As we change the educational experience for our students, the ways in which we evaluate student learning must undergo a change as well.

Howard Gardner, a cognitive psychologist from Harvard University, believed traditional schooling emphasized only two abilities: verbal-linguistic (especially in written form), and logical-mathematical. Yet, there were many other kinds of knowledge and/or talents that enriched our lives and helped us to respond effectively to our environment. Gardner identified the following abilities and skills: visual-spacial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmical, *inter*personal, *intra*personal, logical-mathematical, verbal-linguistic, and naturalistic (Gardner 1987). When schools began using the concept of "multidimensional assessment," the evaluation

of students was based on a broader concept of intelligence, ability, and learning.

Some alternatives to standardized testing being developed and used included criterion-referenced tests, teacher-made tests, contract grading, performance based assessments, student based assessments, and portfolios.

The state of California has developed performance based assessments in writing, science, and history (Massey 1989). The Connecticut Assessment of Educational Progress Program used various performance tasks in assessing science, foreign languages and business education (Baron 1989). Education officials in Vermont were looking to pursue a portfolio assessment approach, in addition to current standardized tests (Massey 1989). Approximately 38 states were using or considering using some form of performance assessment in their statewide testing programs (Thurlow 1995).

The largest criticism of alternative assessments, on a large scale, is that they would require a labor intensive scoring system to compare scores nationwide. The cost of these efforts could be very expensive. The trade-off in such a shift was to sacrifice reliability for validity. That is, performance based tests did not lend themselves to a cost and time efficient method of scoring that provided reliable results. On the other hand, they actually tested what the educational system was responsible for teaching, namely, the skills for performing in the real world (Bowers 1989).

Researcher's Perspective of Local Context

Site H

The class atmosphere of Site H was a relaxed yet structured one. Many students enjoy my band or choir class because, while there was structure to it, it was not as rigidly structured as other classes. The students could relax and enjoy singing and yet, in order to let them have fun, I

did not have to have total chaos.

I would like to see more alternate assessments being used throughout the curriculum because I feel it is important for the students to be assessed, not only on their knowledge, but also on their skills. Because I taught band and choir, I thought it was very important to assess students on their effort and how well their skills progress instead of on their ability. I also thought it was a good idea for the students to get involved in assessing themselves. It can teach them to look at things from a different perspective. By being able to look at things differently, the students can have a greater understanding of what goes on in the world and how people in different situations think. This philosophy could help them greatly in their adult life and is what, I felt, was the goal of education.

Site M

Site M was a special education resource setting with five students in fifth grade. These students had learning disabilities in the language arts and math areas. Site M's philosophy allowed for a full continuum of services including consultation, inclusion, pull out, and self contained settings. Each student was provided the least restrictive environment for his/her educational and social needs.

Alternative assessment can be an intricate part of each student's day. To provide motivation for success, assessing can be fair, student centered, and an accurate measure of their growth. Each student can be an active participant in his/her assessment and education. As a teacher, it was essential to monitor each student's progress in order to provide adequate educational challenges without overwhelming them. Students experiencing difficulties in school received formal and informal assessments to identify any learning disabilities. These assessments began with the classroom teacher meeting with the teacher assistance team.

Members of this team were the school psychologist, principal, special education teacher, nurse, and reading specialist. At the time of the meeting a group decision was made to initiate a full case study and provided interventions to be used in the classroom.

Site C

The first class located at Site C, was 21 students of mixed ethnic and economic backgrounds. They were a fifth grade class that consisted of 11 girls and 10 boys.

The nature of visual arts classes can lend themselves to a less structured atmosphere than most regular classrooms. I felt that the free expression and sharing of ideas would benefit the students with more creative solutions to the problems presented in art class.

I planned to develop more assessments that would measure not only the knowledge that my students acquire, but also the skills they developed. In elementary art, I felt it was important that the students were evaluated on their effort and skills, not on their talent.

I also planned to get my students more involved in their own assessments. I thought my students would produce better work and become more involved when they knew what was expected of them because they had taken part in the development of their own evaluations.

The second class located at Site C was comprised of 21 fifth grade students. My students participated in numerous projects and activities. These activities required innovative assessments that were not always readily available. The remaining activities were more structured and, therefore, much easier to assess. One of the positives in my classroom was that students felt free to express themselves. Students of all ability levels read aloud, answered questions, and participated confidently and comfortably, so encouraging students to perform was not a problem. However, it was sometimes difficult to assess their performance and to adequately evaluate what they had learned. Especially when they expressed their talents and

demonstrated their knowledge in a variety of ways.

I wanted to experiment with alternative types of assessment because I wanted to be able to remove myself from the typical limited methods whereby teachers evaluated students knowledge and creativity. I wanted to see the learning through the eyes of my students instead of my own eyes or the perception of the test developer.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

"As long as tests and assessments are used only as a means to document student achievement, their most powerful benefits will be missed" (Guskey, 2000). Standardized tests did not accurately measure student ability in active skills such as writing, speaking, acting, drawing, constructing, repairing, and other skills that were required of students over the course of their schooling and throughout life. The most powerful benefit of assessment is not making everything the same for everyone, but rather, getting the students more involved in the assessment process in the hope that they would be able to transfer their assessment abilities into other situations in their life.

A survey was used to ascertain student and parent views on current methods of evaluation. (Appendix A & B) The number of positive responses to current grading methods was profound. The parent responses displayed an overwhelming confidence in the grades their children received as being an accurate indication of their *ability*, as shown in the first question of figure 1.

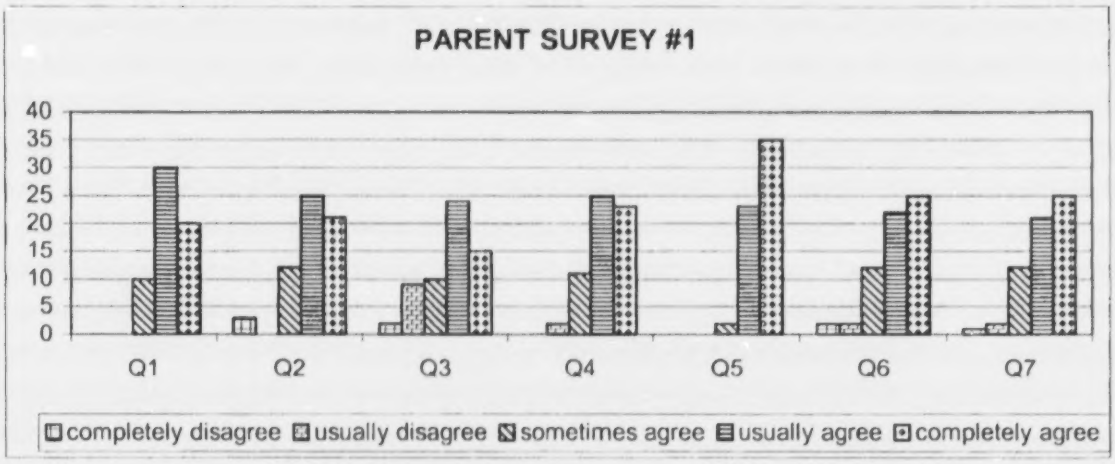


Figure 1. Results of the first parent survey given in September of the 2001-2002 school year.

While most students agreed that their parents understood what they were learning by the grades on their report card (see question ten of figure 2) they were also interested in taking a more active role in their own learning and grading processes, as displayed in questions two and three of figure 2.

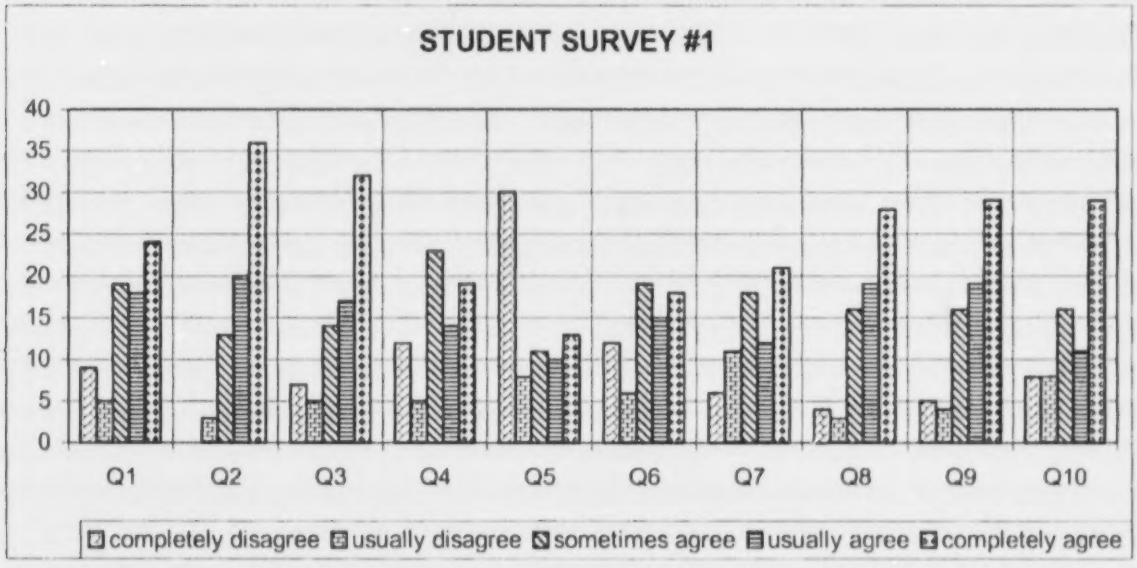


Figure 2. Results of the first student survey given in September of the 2001-2002 school year.

Probable Causes

The literature suggested several underlying reasons why a standardized test was not an authentic and meaningful method of assessment. First, they provided a blanket comparison of students without individual considerations of the student's abilities (Popham, 1999). To a student with poor reading or comprehension skills, a standardized test could be detrimental. Most of these assessments were primarily designed to inform decision-makers about performance on the school, district, and or state level (Loadman and A. Thomas, 1999). It did not take into account the anxiety the test was causing in the student, the fact that the student was not feeling well, or the reality that some students just did not test well (Popham, 1999).

Second, traditional multiple-choice or true/false tests did not give a complete picture of student learning (M. Thomas, 2000). A standardized test did not demonstrate the process of learning or a teacher's educational effectiveness, it only addressed the final answer (Popham, 1999). Final answers did not tell the whole story. "Although educators need to produce valid evidence regarding their effectiveness, standardized achievement tests are the wrong tool for the task" (Popham, 1999).

And third, it interrupted the regular learning environment (Popham, 1999). Pre-tests or test-taking preparation involved an enormous amount of time out of the day in an effort to help the students perform well on standardized tests. All of the preparation that went into preparing for standardized tests hardly seems worth it knowing that "fifty to eighty percent of the test questions are not addressed in textbooks" (Popham, 1999). Often these tests were viewed as being one-dimensional, biased, and simply not useful for classroom teachers (Loadman and A. Thomas, 1999). It seemed ludicrous to suppose that merely stating that "all children will

perform task T at level P" would accomplish much (Noddings, 1997).

There were also many consequences of standardized testing, both on the teacher level and the student level. On the teacher level the tests raised anxiety levels by threatening public disclosure of their ineffectiveness and failed to give them the tools they needed to deal with that increased tension. They sharply increased a teacher's level of nervous activity to guess what course of instructional action might lead to higher test scores. The teachers became intensely defensive, highly frustrated and then left the profession because they felt a profound lack of support.

On the student level, there was an increasing pressure to score high on tests, a lack of focused opportunities to learn, and a feeling of hopelessness that could cause them to stop caring and then stop trying. Finally, those students that stopped *believing* they were capable of learning could stop learning (Stiggins, 1999). "It is ridiculous and irresponsible to set standards for children that well educated adults cannot meet" (Noddings, 1997).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Assessment was changing due to the fact that there were changes in the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the world today. Due to the current demands of society, it was important to understand how students learn. The learning goals for the students were changing as the current knowledge about the relationship between assessment and instruction changed. As a result of this, the assessment strategies, as connected to assessment design, must change to tie assessment design and content to new outcomes.

Our society had shifted from an industrial age, where individuals could compete with only basic reading and arithmetic skills, to an age of information. This new age required individuals to interpret, analyze, access, and use information to solve problems and make decisions. As a result, the competencies and skills needed for success must change.

Early theories of learning assumed that complex, higher-order skills had to be acquired bit by bit into prerequisite skills. This was a type of building blocks approach. It was assumed after memorizing by rote, students could assemble complex understanding and insights. In today's perspective, we know learning must be reflective, constructive, and self-regulated. We are not merely recorders of factual information, but we are creators of our own individual knowledge structure.

We now understood that we do not just *need* to perform, but we need to know *how* to perform and adapt to new situations. Multiple choice, true/false, short answer, or fill in the blank tests, which focus on specific factual information, were not of primary importance in the assessment of meaningful learning (Dietel, Herman, & Knuth, 1991).

"Performance assessment is aimed at moving away from testing practices that require students to select the single correct answer from an array of four or five distracters, to a practice that requires students to create evidence through performance that will enable assessors to make a valid judgment about what the students 'know and can do' in situations that really matter" (Eisner, 1999).

English researchers Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam reported sizable gains in standardized test scores in classrooms with performance assessments developed and used by their teachers. Two other important features from the Black and Wiliam study were:

- the students have to be actively involved
- the benefits of involving students in self-assessment affect motivation and self esteem

This was compelling research evidence that student involved assessment could lead to increased student learning (Stiggins, 1999).

Performance assessment provided a valuable alternative to norm referenced tests. This assessment contributed to a complete picture of what students knew and were able to do (Elliott, 1992). Good assessments were consistent and reliable. They involved teachers, students, and parents. In addition, assessments could indicate to a teacher what worked and what did not work in their instruction. They could allow teachers to analyze their personal strengths and weaknesses and initiate ways to improve the quality of their teaching. Classroom assessments could enhance teachers' instructional strategies, which in turn, would improve student learning

(Guskey, 2000).

Some of the characteristics of quality assessment include:

- active involvement by students in setting goals and criteria
- students create, produce, perform, and be involved in effective assessment
- students must use higher level thinking and/or problem solving skills
- tasks should measure metacognitive skills and attitudes, collaborative skills, and interpersonal skills
- assessments measure meaningful instructional activities
- tasks are integrated into real world applications
- responses from students are scored according to specific criteria, which defines standards for good performance
- content of tests matches teachers' educational objectives and instructional emphasis
- good assessment measures a full range of knowledge and skills and sets clear expectations (Dietel, Herman, & Knuth, 1991).

In order to improve students' performance several ideas need to be implemented. These include:

- selecting tasks or assessments that relate to what has been taught
- sharing the rubric for the task beforehand
- providing students with examples of the activity
- modeling the intended activity in advance for students
- encouraging students to complete self-assessment for their work (Elliott, 1992)

Students could take an active role in their learning and assessment. It was the teachers' challenge to keep students from losing confidence in themselves as learners and build confidence

in students who have faced failure repeatedly. If these students were to believe in themselves, they needed first to experience success in their learning environment. Success could lead to confidence which in turn could lead to increased effort and motivation. This success needs to occur frequently through continuous classroom assessment. Three tools to provide student motivation were:

- student involved assessment
- student involved record keeping
- student involved communication and goal setting

With these three tools, we could enable students to more fully experience a diverse learning adventure (Stiggins, 1999).

Some common and effective types of alternative assessment were portfolios, rubrics, checklists, inventories, and anecdotal records. The primary purpose of a student portfolio was to demonstrate what had been learned in a given class or subject. It included examples of cooperative behavior, critical thinking, goal setting, study skills, and unfinished or rough draft samples which showed student improvement by reworking or revising their work. The student might include contributions to the school or community to demonstrate leadership or citizenship (Kimeldorf, 1994).

There were many advantages to portfolio assessment. For example, this type of assessment was more likely to motivate students to put forth their best effort and take pride in ownership. The student became more conscious of their role as an evaluator and assessor in their own learning. Portfolios also taught students to save and value their work and demonstrated the time, effort, and improvement that had gone into it (Rea, 1991).

Sometimes portfolios included rubrics which were a reflection of the teachers' and students' ideas and values in regard to the learning experience. Building rubrics was a powerful teaching tool. Several important characteristics of rubrics were:

- they are a visible form of an agreed upon standard of assessment
- they should be constructed by the teacher and/or the student through discussion
- they are an everchanging method of assessment
- they need to be available to students so they know specifically what is expected of them (Allen, 1997).

Other assessment forms were checklists and inventories. These were two of the easiest tools for recording students' progress. They were based on instructional objectives and the development associated with the acquisition of skills or behavior being monitored. Another form of assessment was using anecdotal records which were factual, not judgmental, notes of student activities. They were most useful for recording spontaneous events. They could be cumulative, revealing insights about the student's progress when reviewed sequentially.

"In much of the popular and professional literature, standardized multiple-choice testing is out. Performance assessment, also known as, "authentic" or "new" assessment, or the "3 P's"- performance, portfolios, and products--is in" (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999).

Project Objective and Processes

The objectives of our project were twofold. As our first objective, we created a more comprehensive evaluation method for our students that included the use of portfolios, journaling, surveys, and rubrics.

Our second objective increased student participation in class by increasing their involvement in the assessment process. Students would be taught to create rubrics for self

assessment and how to choose and reflect on their selection for a portfolio.

Our research addressed the following questions:

1. Will student effort increase as they become more involved with their own assessment?
2. Will students gain a better and more complete understanding of their achievements and progress?
3. Will parents gain a better and more complete understanding of their child's achievements and progress?
4. Will teachers gain a better and more complete understanding of their students achievements and progress?
5. Can students be taught to create their own assessment tools? If so, will they be an accurate indication of their performance?

Project Action Plan

Week 1

Students were introduced to the project. The following skills were discussed:

- purpose and definition of a portfolio
- how to put together a portfolio
- purpose and definition of a reflection
- how to write a reflection (Appendix E)
- purpose and definition of a rubric
- how to write a rubric
- how to use a rubric
- purpose and definition of a survey
- purpose and definition of behavioral checklists.

Week 2

Students created and developed personal goals for the project. Continued to teach about portfolios, rubrics, and reflections. Administered the first of two student surveys. (Appendix B)

Week 3

Students introduced to cooperative learning skills. Students collected and reflected on artifacts.

Week 4

Students learned to construct rubrics.

Week 5

Students learned the purpose of rubrics and surveys.

Week 6

Students collected and reflected on artifacts. The first of two parent surveys was sent out. (Appendix A)

Week 7

Collected the first of two student made rubrics. (Appendix G-I)

Week 8

Introduced multiple intelligences.

Week 9

Developed multiple intelligences. Students collected and reflected on artifacts.

Week 10-11-12

Discussed organization of portfolio. Organized portfolio. Selected and/or created cover for portfolio.

Week 13

Gallery walk of portfolios. Reflected on changes to be made in portfolio.

Week 14

Changed portfolio, if applicable. Collected second of two student made rubrics. (Appendix G-I)

Week 15

Self and peer evaluation of portfolio. (Appendix F) Administered the second of two student surveys. (Appendix D)

Week 16

Students reflected on their goals and processes. Second of two parent surveys was sent to respond on the project, the portfolio, and the process. (Appendix C)

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, the students and parents were given surveys before, and after the 16-week intervention to ascertain changes in attitudes toward assessment and develop an awareness of individual student learning. In addition to this, the teachers kept anecdotal journals, created and used rubrics, and taught the students to create and use rubrics. The students also created a portfolio that contained artifacts and reflections to document students' growth and learning.

Information gathered was used to determine whether alternate assessments were a more comprehensive way of exhibiting student achievement. The expectations were that the post intervention data would support the use of various types of evaluation. We believed alternate assessments were a more complete and, more importantly, authentic assessment of student behavior.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of our project was twofold. As our first objective, we created a more comprehensive evaluation method for our students, which included the use of portfolios, journaling, surveys, and rubrics.

Our second objective was to increase our students' participation in class by increasing their involvement in the assessment process. Students were taught to create rubrics for self assessment and how to choose and reflect on their selection for a portfolio. These objectives showed that using many different types of assessments was a more authentic and meaningful method of assessment.

During the first week of the intervention, the students were given an overview of the entire project. Among the many things discussed were the definitions and uses for portfolios, reflections, rubrics, surveys, and checklists. Also discussed and reinforced throughout the project was the process involved in writing reflections and rubrics. Most students had little or no experience with either of these things so it was very important to teach them *how* to do it.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the validity of alternative assessments the students and parents completed two surveys. The initial survey was given during the first week of the intervention process and the final survey was given during the last week of the intervention process.

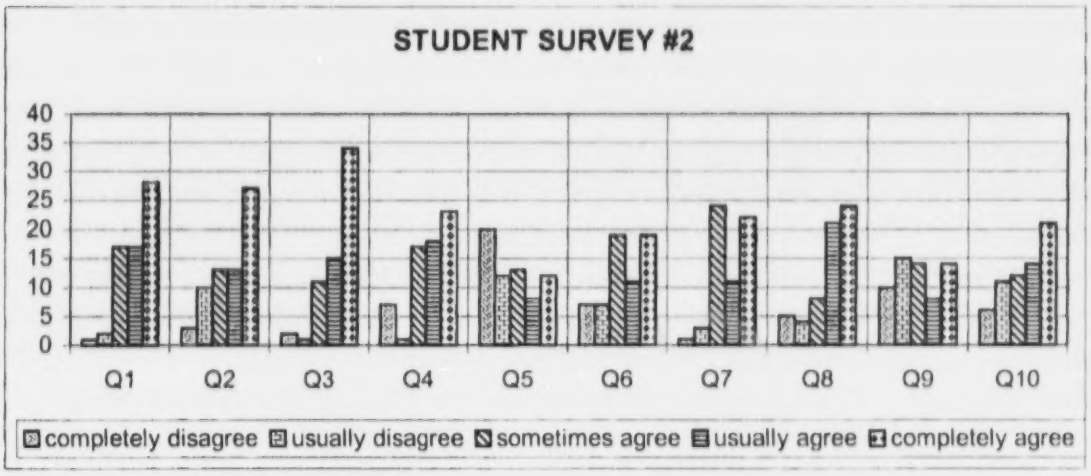
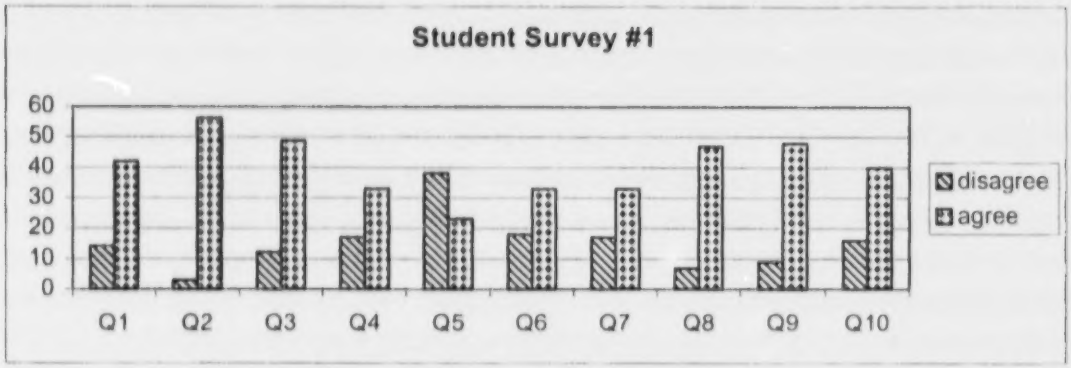
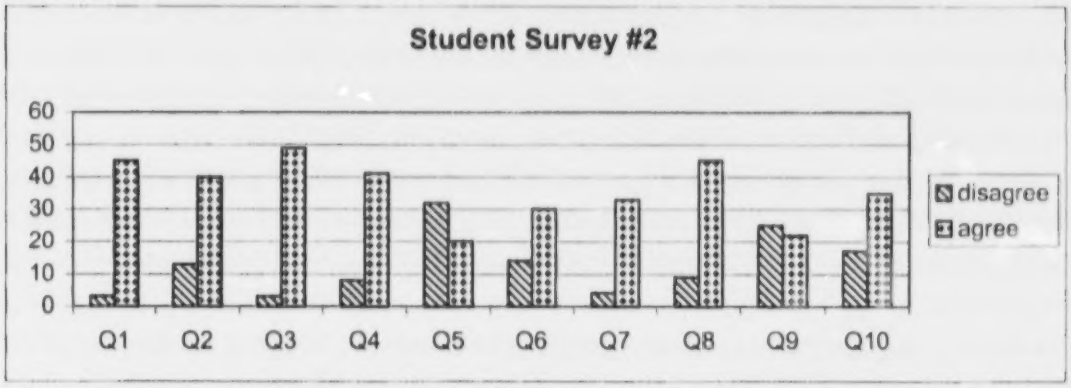


Figure 3. Results of the second student survey given in January of the 2001-2002 school year.

As compared to the first student survey, the results of question one in the student survey, indicated that 19% of students increased input on their grades and the grading process (see figures 3-5). The students' interest in having more control over their learning decreased by 36% as shown in question number two. The percentage of students who felt it was acceptable to help decide their grade increased by 25. Results indicated that students felt they could better judge the quality of their own work as shown in question number seven. Statistics in this area increased by 18% from the first student survey. The amount of students who felt that the grades they received were always fair and accurate decreased by 58%.





Figures 4 & 5. Breakdown of positive/negative results of the student surveys.

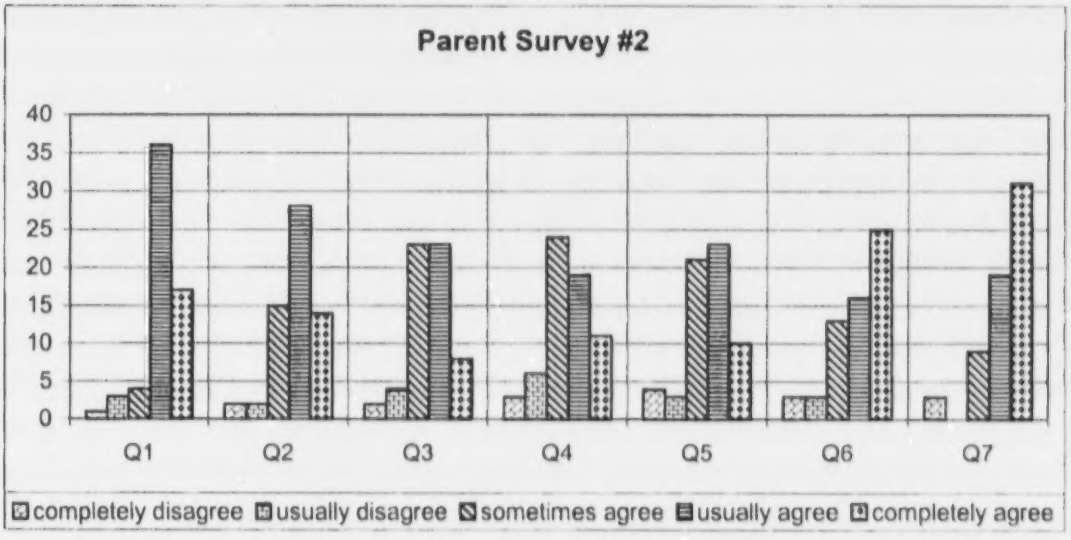
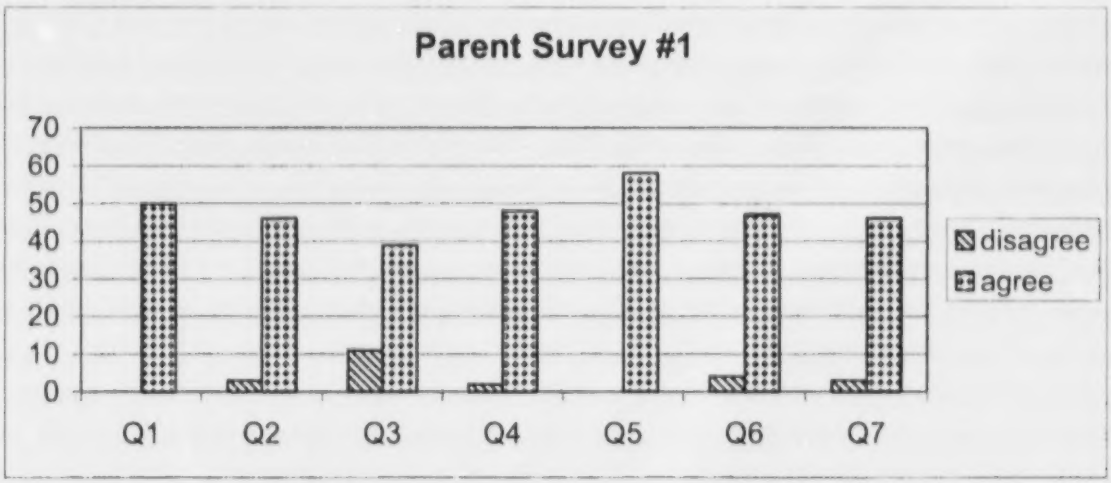
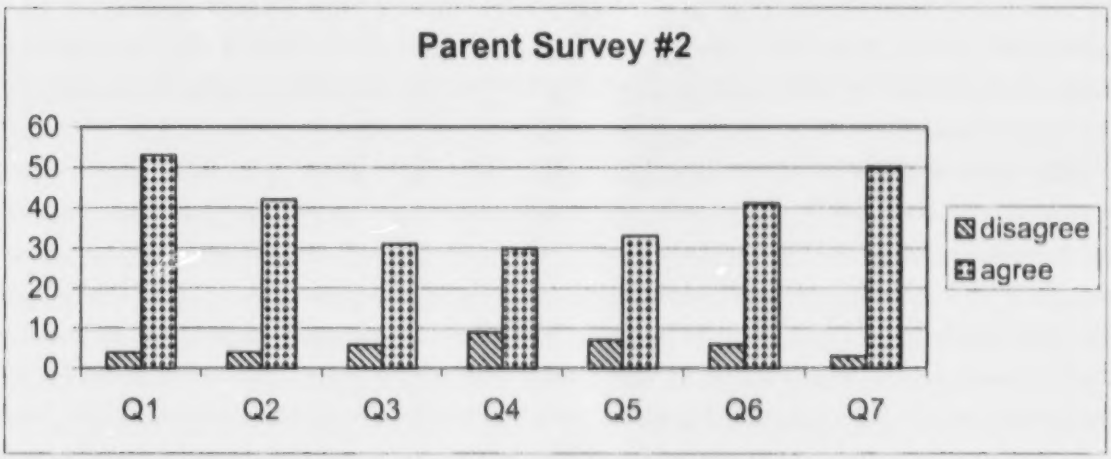


Figure 6. Results of the second parent survey given in January of the 2001-2002 school year.

As compared to the first parent survey, 42% of those surveyed indicated a decrease in the amount of discussion of school activities at home (see figures 6-8). In addition, 53% of parents felt their child was not as interested in learning as they would prefer. The next area of concern from the survey indicated that there was a 13% decrease of students who saved their work at home. Finally, the remaining items from both surveys had minimal changes.





Figures 7 & 8. Breakdown of positive/negative results of parent surveys.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Approximately 73 students and 60 parents responded to the surveys. Most attitudes toward the items on the survey did not change significantly from the pre- to post- intervention. Several items though, conveyed a shift in attitudes following the conclusion of the project.

Based on the results of our surveys, students confirmed that they were allowed more control over their grades. They also discovered it was acceptable to be an integral part of the grading process. After being involved in the portfolio process the students felt more confident and capable of assessing the quality of their work. The students realized that they wanted more control over their grades. However, they were reluctant to assume the responsibility for their learning. This indicated that students at this age still require structure and guidance. They also felt the grades they received were not always fair and accurate. Although the results of this survey were very positive, we felt there were still some areas that needed to be improved. For example, many of the students did not fully understand the meaning of the word input on the survey. This may have confused some students and possibly invalidated their response to that question.

On the other hand, the parent surveys had a much different perspective than the students. At the conclusion of the project, parents stated their child did not discuss classroom activities and events at home. Many parents also responded that this project did not increase their children's interest in learning. This information leads us to question the reliability of the parent responses. This may have been due to a lack of interest or the time of year. The construction of the survey included five choices for each of the seven questions. In retrospect, we felt that this was too many from which to choose. In addition, we felt that we could have had a more accurate view of

the parents' reactions if we had placed the agree responses to the left and the disagree responses to the right. (Appendix A)

The results of this project suggest that students not only can become a more active part of the grading process, but also can look forward to the opportunity. Alternative assessments gave students the opportunity and ability to judge their own work and to show the skills they were acquiring in school. Portfolios gave students a chance to evaluate their progress and reflect on their work.

Our recommendation for future implementation of this project would be to spread it out over a two-year period. The first year would be used to introduce teachers to various methods of alternative assessments and how to create them. The second year could be devoted strictly to developing portfolios with their students. Students would also be instructed in the process of writing description/reflection pages and how to create rubrics themselves. Unanimously, we found it was extremely difficult to remain on schedule. More time was required than we initially projected to accomplish the tasks in our action plan.

Researchers Reflection of Project

Site H

Looking back on the intervention process of my group, I would have to say the project was a success. There were things that surprised me at the beginning, such as many of the responses to the first parent survey, that did not change much by the end. I honestly believe most parents of today are so used to standardized testing that they have it ingrained in their brain that it's the only way to go. They don't realize that standardized tests just don't give as much information as many other forms of assessment. The student surveys, on the other hand, were a lot more optimistic. At the beginning, most of my students felt similarly to the ways of their

parents. By the end, the majority of them started to have views of their own and you could see the wheels start to turn. This was just a stepping stone for a lot of them and I believe that it was a necessary one.

Site M

My main objective with this action research project was to provide students with an opportunity to increase their motivation to learn. As a special education teacher, many of the students I work with have experienced failure during their educational years. This may have been due to learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or mental impairments. To counteract this situation I found it crucial to develop a strategy to change they way they experienced school. This research project, alternative assessment, has been successful in accomplishing this objective.

I have found many positive results stemming from the use of student guided assessment portfolios. Students became directly involved in their learning through goal setting, self-monitoring, and investigating. Portfolios provided a direct route to empowering students to take an active role in their educational development. Portfolios also provided parents with an authentic tool to measure their child's progress in school. This, in turn, improved communication between home and school. When parents were actively involved in their child's education, the whole school experience was enhanced. This alternative assessment process has enabled students and in the process increased their motivation and success in school.

Site C

As one of the two classes located at site C, I felt that the project went well. The students in my targeted class enjoyed creating their portfolios and presenting them to their parents. Even

after the project was over, my students asked if they could continue to add artifacts to their portfolios and present them again at the end of the year.

The other assessment tools we used had a mixed reception. Some students enjoyed the chance to make their own grading rubric, and became part of the grading process. Many did not like the description/reflection page that accompanied their artifacts in the portfolios. The students struggled with writing about details and their feelings. I felt that if I continued to do this, I would need to spend more time modeling the actual writing of the descriptions and reflections. One thing that the students liked about the portfolios was that they had the opportunity to choose artifacts that were not necessarily a success, but taught them something. I thought it was important that children know that we also learn from our failures.

I was happy with the student surveys because I felt they showed that most students saw this alternative method as a better assessment of the various skills and knowledge they had gained. Having specific examples of their successes and failures was a much better indication of the progress they made. I think the students found that they enjoyed taking an active part in the learning and evaluation process. Students also became more aware of the opportunity to discuss a grade with their teacher than they had in the past. Because the students had exposure to the portfolio, reflections, and rubrics every week, I think they had a clearer understanding of how it made grading different. I think this was *not* the case with the parent survey.

The parent survey did not go well. I think this was due to a lack of exposure to the things we were doing in class, and a lifelong acceptance of traditional grading methods. At open house several parents talked to me about their child's portfolio and how they thought it was a good way to accompany the report card. According to the second parent survey, they thought the portfolio was a great way to save their child's work.

The other problem I felt we had with the surveys was the wording on some of the questions. I felt the phrasing, which sounded great when we wrote it, was actually a little beyond many of my fifth grade students. Several of my students had trouble with the word "input." We discussed it, but many still didn't quite understand. It made me wonder if the parents were confused on some of the items also.

As the second class located at Site C, I developed a new understanding of the learning and assessment process. Previously I didn't feel that ISAT and ITBS tests depicted accurate ability levels in students but I was unaware of the various alternative assessments available.

After researching a variety of assessments I became aware of the fact that these student tests depict only a narrow portion of a student's ability. They do nothing to show how a students learning process develops. I can still see the necessity of standardized tests as well as report cards. The development of our student portfolio was to enhance student learning.

One of the most beneficial pieces of information I learned conducting this research project was that the reflection was the most important part of the learning process rather than the actual experience. This project has changed the way I view learning and the assessment processes.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Survey #1

		completely disagree	**usually disagree**	**sometimes agree**	**usually agree**	**completely agree**
1.	I feel the grades my child receives is an accurate indication of his/her *ability*.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I am kept aware of the skills my child is learning in school.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I feel the state wide standardized test scores I receive on my child are an accurate indication of his/her *ability*.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	My child often discusses classroom activities and events at home.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I feel my child is interested in learning.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	My child often saves work or projects from school at home.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I often save my child's work or projects from school at home.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B
Student Survey #1

		completely disagree	**usually disagree**	**sometimes agree**	**usually agree**	**completely agree**
1.	I feel I have a lot of input on what my grade is.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I am interested in having more control of my learning.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I am interested in having more control over my grade.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	It is acceptable for students to help decide their grade.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I would feel comfortable disagreeing with my teacher about a grade.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	If I had more of a say in my grade, I would put more effort into my work.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I feel I can judge the *quality* of my own work.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I feel my work is valuable and worth saving.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I feel the grades I get are always fair and accurate.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I feel my parents understand what I am learning by the grades on my report card.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C
Parent Survey #2

1. Now that I have seen an alternate way of grading, I feel the grades my child receives, on his/her report card, are an accurate indication of his/her *ability*.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

2. Now that I have seen an alternate way of grading, I feel that I am truly kept aware of the *skills* my child is learning in most of his/her classes.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

3. Now that I have seen an alternate way of grading, I feel the state wide standardized test scores I receive on my child are an accurate indication oh his/her *ability*.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

4. Throughout the course of this project, my child has discussed classroom activities and events more frequently. (about any class, not just choir)

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

5. Now that I have seen an alternate way of grading, I feel that my child is more interested in learning than they were before.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

6. I anticipate that my child will probably save this particular project for a while.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

7. I would like to save this particular project done by my student for a while.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

(Additional space for comments on back)

Appendix D
Student Survey #2

1. Now that I have been through this project, I feel that I have had a lot of control over what my grade could be.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

2. Now that I have been through this project, it makes me want to have more control of my learning elsewhere in school.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

3. Now that I have been through this project, it makes me want to have more control of my *grade* elsewhere in school.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

4. Now that I have been through this project, I think it is acceptable for students to help decide their grade.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

5. Now that I have been through this project, I would feel comfortable disagreeing with my teacher about a grade.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

6. Now that I have been through this project, I think that if I had more say in my grade in other classes, I would put more effort into my work.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

7. Now that I have been through this project, I feel that I can judge the *quality* of my own work better than I could before.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

8. Now that I have been through this project, I feel that my work is more valuable and worth saving.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

9. Now that I have been through this project, I feel the grades I get in other classes are *always* fair and accurate.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

10. Now that I have been through this project, I feel that my parents understand *what* I am learning in my classes based only on the grades they see on my report card.

completely disagree **usually disagree** **sometimes agree**
usually agree **completely agree**

Additional comments

Appendix E
Reflection Sheet

Description

Reflection

Appendix F
Final Portfolio Rubric

	4 **Superior Evidence**	**3** **Good Evidence**	**2** **Partial Evidence**	**1** **Poor Evidence**	**0** **No Evidence**
ORGANIZATION	Extremely organized. Very useful portfolio.	Somewhat organized. Useable portfolio.	Able to follow. Clear *attempt* at organization.	Unclear flow and organization.	No flow or evidence of organization.
CONTENT	All elements present. Many examples of "thinking beyond her years"	1-2 elements missing. Some examples of " thinking beyond her years"	3-4 elements missing. Adequate examples of "thinking beyond her years"	5-7 elements missing. An attempt was made to "think beyond her years"	8 or more elements missing. No attempt to "think beyond her years"
NEATNESS	Typed—no mechanical or grammatical errors	Typed—few mechanical or grammatical errors	*Legibly* handwritten-few mechanical or grammatical errors	Typed—many mechanical or grammatical errors	Handwritten—many mechanical or grammatical errors
THOUGHT PROCESS	Reflections are excellently structured and exceptionally crafted.	Reflections and self assessment provide(s) awareness, understanding, and opinions.	Reflections and self assessment provide(s) an attempt to understand and voice opinions.	Reflections and self assessment meet(s) minimal requirements.	No thought process present.

GRADING SCALE
14-16 = A
12-13 = B
9-11 = C
7-8 = D
6 and below = F

Appendix G
Example of a student made rubric

	4 Superior Evidence	3 Good Evidence	2 Partial Evidence	1 Poor Evidence	0 No Evidence
PITCH ACCURACY	All 4 measures correct	3 measures correct	2 measures correct	1 measure correct	No measures correct
RHYTHM ACCURACY	All 4 measures correct	3 measures correct	2 measures correct	1 measure correct	No measures correct
STEADY BEAT	4 measures were steady	3 measures were steady	2 measures were steady	1 measure was steady	No measures were steady
CORRECT SYLLABLES	15-17 syllables correct	11-14 syllables correct	5-10 syllables correct	1-4 syllables correct	No syllables correct
VOLUME & CLARITY	Loud & clear	Clear but not loud	Barely understandable	Mumbled or whispered	Screamed or said nothing
EFFORT	Tried her best	Tried but could have done better	Little effort	Sounded bored	Didn't care

Grading Scale
20-24=A
15-19=B
10-14=C
5-9=D
0=4=F

Appendix H
Example of a student made rubric

D.O.L. Corrections

Name_____

	3	2	1	0
Corrections are made				
Spaces between words				
Name in cursive				
Letters formed correctly				
Total				

Appendix I
Example of a student made rubric

Writing Rubric

Name_____ Date_____

Teacher_____

0	1	2	3	4
Does not participate	Subject verb agreement when reminded	Subject verb agreement improving	Subject verb agreement usually present	Subject verb agreement
	Sentences require expanding	Simple sentences	Attempts sentence variety	Sentence variety
	Needs help and reference for spelling	Checks spelling with a reference	Adequate spelling. Beginning to use challenging words	Spelling usually correct. Attempts difficult words.
	Needs assistance to organize	Beginning to organize independently	Organizes information	Very organized with clear information

Points scored_____ Grade_____

Additional comments:_____

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